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Burr Combs

A Problem In Transposition

By C. L. Swanson

Unless you are an Indian, your ancestors came from the Old Hemisphere either on the Mayflower or on some other ship. (Mine came here on a much nicer and larger ship.) I have always thought that it took a lot of courage on the part of my parents to come to a new country where a new language was spoken and where new customs were in use. Yet suddenly a thought came to me that took some of the superiority out of my dreams. Everyone else had ancestors who had taken that very step (some stride) or else had done the little crossing for themselves.

Just for fun (maybe you'll differ on this word) let's suppose that our roaming ancestors who had crossed the briny had been home-loving people and had not strayed away from their firesides. Picture yourself in England, Italy, Germany, France, or whatever country from which your ancestors came. During the past twenty years great experiences would have been your lot. First, the quiet, peaceful life perhaps on one of the many clean, small, neat farms, or in a village or city. Then would have come the period of rumor and fearful tidings. This short period would have been followed by dreadful fighting which would leave your country (yours in supposition) war-torn and in a state of upheaval and distress. Then a little later we would see this same disrupted country laboring bravely under serious difficulties to build up to pre-war strength, both financially and physically.

Had I been born and raised in the native land of my parents, I might have lived on a small farm at my present age. Previous to this I would have attended school, and also served two years in the army, where I would have worn a khaki uniform in drill and a magnificent dress uniform in parade. When on a furlough I would walk stately down the street with my blue dress coat buttoned tightly up under my chin. On such occasions how I would have thrilled the maidens, and all of the other boys would have called me "Spare Ribs," or the equivalent in their tongue, because of the gold braid on the coat resembling the ribs that it covered.

And after the army training was over and I had settled down to a lifetime of work, what fun we would

have at the folk dances and at the gatherings. When I was rather young my mother took me to her old home for a visit. I remember the large, full, holiday dresses and aprons that were worn by the girls. Green, red, blue and purple, all deep colors worked on a background of white. Some contrast in my mind with our native flapper in regulation street attire. In the U. S. A. clothes don't make the man, but the lack of clothes proclaims the woman.

And one more thing just between friends: Volstead didn't have much influence over there. That probably has a meaning to some of you.

But would we have been satisfied or contented in such surroundings? Very likely not! Our ancestors were ambitious, adventurous or of a roving disposition, or they would never have crossed the Atlantic pond, that famous old landmark that comes up close to our east coast (and is so dry that it is dusty until you get twelve miles from shore). And if the majority of ambitious people came to America, doesn't it seem reasonable that a large proportion of their descendants should inherit that same trait?

(Author's note:) Even as you and I.

(Editor's note:) The above phrase was borrowed from some more noted author.

(Author's note:) All right, Ed.; you return it when you're through with it.

Now the way we feel about it is that the European doesn't hurry quite as much as we do. We feel that he is not forced to rush and push throughout his lifetime. He has more time to study art and literature, more time to relax. Whether this is true or not, we have been assured by Europeans that our citizens are rushing aimlessly around, worrying themselves into an early grave. There is more truth than poetry in that statement, too. It does not apply to every case, but if you take nine out of every ten successful men you will find that as a rule they worked all day and planned, studied or worked part of the night. While he was young he couldn't afford to "lay off," and when he became older his cares and responsibilities would not let him

grow lax. The successful business man is usually at the head of a company or corporation which has financed itself by bonds or stocks. These securities are held by laboring men, by retired or wealthy farmers, by merchants and by all manner of men. The president of the company must in the end answer to these men. This and his duty to the public and to humanity keep him at his post long after he should be.

The laboring man, or the clerk, or the stenographer, or the machine operator in the factory, can't stop. If he wasn't on hand every day, he or she couldn't keep up with the crowd in dresses, cars, and a million other little things that you all know about.

Then look at the holidays that the European has which we do not. We have six holidays that are regularly observed, with sometimes Armistice Day making seven. Europeans think we are a young country and haven't reasons for holidays. But look at the great men we have had, the wars we have won, and other great events which slower moving people might elaborate into holidays. We're too busy for holidays.

The Old World farmer may cut around his little field with a hand sickle to save every grain of wheat. The western wheat grower cuts, threshes and sacks his wheat with one operation, the wheat handled entirely by machinery. Can you wonder why the American backs his car out of the garage to drive two city blocks to the grocery, or the clothier?

The little Old-World girls, with the shy courtesy, a salutation, half bowing, half-kneeling, still remains in my memory. I wonder if this custom still is used? Contrast it to the U. S. flapper, much mentioned and little understood.

Well, now, after you have thought it over a few minutes, what do you say to returning. "Nothin' doin'!" Just as I expected. We may bewail the rush of the American people, but no one wants to go back where it may be easier to lose ambition and to enjoy life in a slower, easier fashion than to rush and dig (and sometimes borrow) to have a nicer home, or a longer car, or a more powerful radio than our neighbor, who is doing the same to outshine us.

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